

An introduction to Gurmukhi

Gurmukhi, a derivative of Landa, is a type of script called an abugida. It was standardised by Guru Angad Dev in the sixteenth century and is designed to write the Punjabi language.

This guide introduces the main concepts of the Gurmukhi script in relation to the Punjabi language. Gurmukhi has been adapted to write other languages (such as Sanskrit) but these adaptations will generally not be covered.

The Alphabet

The Gurmukhi (or Punjabi) alphabet contains thirty-five distinct letters. These are:

ੳ	ਅ	ੲ
Ura	Era	Iri

The first three letters are unique because they form the basis for vowels. Apart from Era, these characters are never used on their own. See the section on vowels for further details.

ਸ	ਹ	ਕ	ਖ	ਗ	ਘ
Sussa <i>Sa</i>	Haha <i>Ha</i>	Kukka <i>Ka</i>	Khukha <i>Kha</i>	Gugga <i>Ga</i>	Ghugga <i>Gha</i>
ਙ	ਚ	ਛ	ਜ	ਝ	ਞ
Ungga <i>Nga</i>	Chucha <i>Ca</i>	Chhuchha <i>Cha</i>	Jujja <i>Ja</i>	Jhujja <i>Jha</i>	Yanza <i>Nya</i>
ਟ	ਠ	ਡ	ਢ	ਣ	ਤ
Tainka <i>Tta</i>	Thutha <i>Ttha</i>	Dudda <i>Dda</i>	Dhudda <i>Ddha</i>	Nahnha <i>Nna</i>	Tutta <i>Ta</i>
ਥ	ਦ	ਧ	ਨ	ਪ	ਫ
Thutha <i>Tha</i>	Duda <i>Da</i>	Dhuda <i>Dha</i>	Nunna <i>Na</i>	Puppa <i>Pa</i>	Phupha <i>Pha</i>
ਬ	ਭ	ਮ	ਯ	ਰ	ਲ
Bubba <i>Ba</i>	Bhubba <i>Bha</i>	Mumma <i>Ma</i>	Yaiyya <i>Ya</i>	Rara <i>Ra</i>	Lulla <i>La</i>
ਵ	ੜ				
Vava <i>Va</i>	Rahrha <i>Rra</i>				

In addition to these, there are six consonants created by placing a dot (bindi) at the foot (pair) of the consonant:

ਸ਼	ਖ਼	ਗ਼	ਜ਼	ਫ਼	ਲ਼
Shusha pair bindi <i>Sha</i>	Khukha pair bindi <i>Khha</i>	Gugga pair bindi <i>Ghha</i>	Zuzza pair bindi <i>Za</i>	Fuffa pair bindi <i>Fa</i>	Lulla pair bindi <i>Lla</i>

Vowels

Gurmukhi follows similar concepts to other Brahmi scripts and as such, all consonants are followed by an inherent 'a' sound (unless at the end of a word when the 'a' is usually dropped). This inherent vowel sound can be changed by using dependent vowel signs which attach to a baring consonant. In some cases, dependent vowel signs cannot be used – at the beginning of a word or syllable for instance – and so an independent vowel character is used instead.

Dependent vowels

◌◌	◌ਾ	◌ਿ	◌ੀ	◌ੇ	◌ੈ
Mukta <i>a</i>	Kanna <i>aa</i>	Sihari <i>i</i>	Bihari <i>ii</i>	Lavan <i>ee</i>	Dulavan <i>ai</i>
◌ੁ	◌ੂ	◌ੋ	◌ੌ		
Onkar <i>u</i>	Dulankar <i>uu</i>	Hora <i>oo</i>	Kanaura <i>au</i>		

Dotted circles represent the barer consonant. Vowels are always pronounced after the consonant they are attached to. Thus, Sihari is always written to the left, but pronounced after the character on the right.

Independent Vowels

ਅ	ਆ	ਇ	ਈ	ਏ	ਐ
<i>a</i>	<i>aa</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ii</i>	<i>ee</i>	<i>ai</i>
ਉ	ਊ	ਓ	ਔ		
<i>u</i>	<i>uu</i>	<i>oo</i>	<i>au</i>		

Vowel Examples

ਆਲੂ – aaluu – potato

ਦਿਲ – dil – heart

Halant

The Halant character is not used when writing Punjabi in Gurmukhi. However, it may occasionally be used in Sanskritised text. When it is used, it represents the suppression of the inherent vowel.



The affect of this is shown below:

ਕਾ – Ka

ਕ̣ – K

Numbers

Gurmukhi has its own set of numerals that behave exactly as Latin (Arabic) numerals do. These are used extensively in older texts. In modern contexts, they are being replaced by standard Latin numerals although they are still in widespread use.

੦ Sifar 0	੧ Ek 1	੨ Dhau 2	੩ Tinn 3	੪ Char 4	੫ Panj 5
੬ Chaay 6	੭ Sat 7	੮ Aht 8	੯ Noh 9		

Other Signs

ੴ	ੴ	ੴ
Bindi	Tippi	Addak

Bindi and Tippi are used for nasalisation (similar to the 'n' sound in words ending in 'ing'). In general, Onkar (u) and Dulankar (uu) take Bindi in their initial forms and Tippi when used after a consonant. All other short vowels take Tippi and all other long vowels take Bindi. Older texts may not follow these conventions.

The use of Addak indicates that the following consonant is geminate. This means that the subsequent consonant is doubled or reinforced.

Conjuncts

A conjoined consonant combines two (or more) consonants. Modern Gurmukhi employs three main conjoined characters that sit at the bottom of a barer consonant. A half form of Yaiyya (ya) is also occasionally used.

ਹ	ਰ	ਵ	ਯ
Ha	Ra	Va	Ya

The affect of this is shown below:

Mha - ਮ + ਹ = ਮ੍ਹ

Pra - ਪ + ਰ = ਪ੍ਰ

Dva - ਦ + ਵ = ਦ੍ਵ

Dya - ਦ + ਯ = ਦ੍ਯ

Ek Onkar

Ek Onkar is a Gurmukhi symbol that is often used in Sikh literature. It literally means 'one God'.



Visarg

The Visarg symbol is very occasionally used in Gurmukhi. It can either represent an abbreviation (like period is used in English) or it can act like a Sanskrit Visarg where a voiceless 'h' sound is pronounced after the vowel.

